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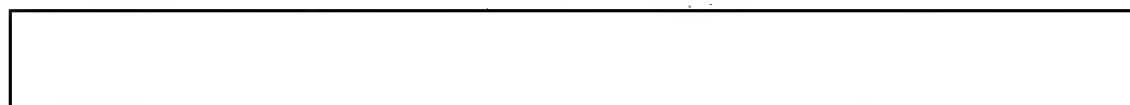
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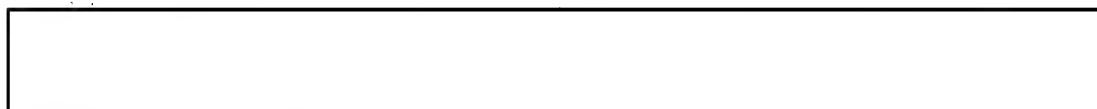
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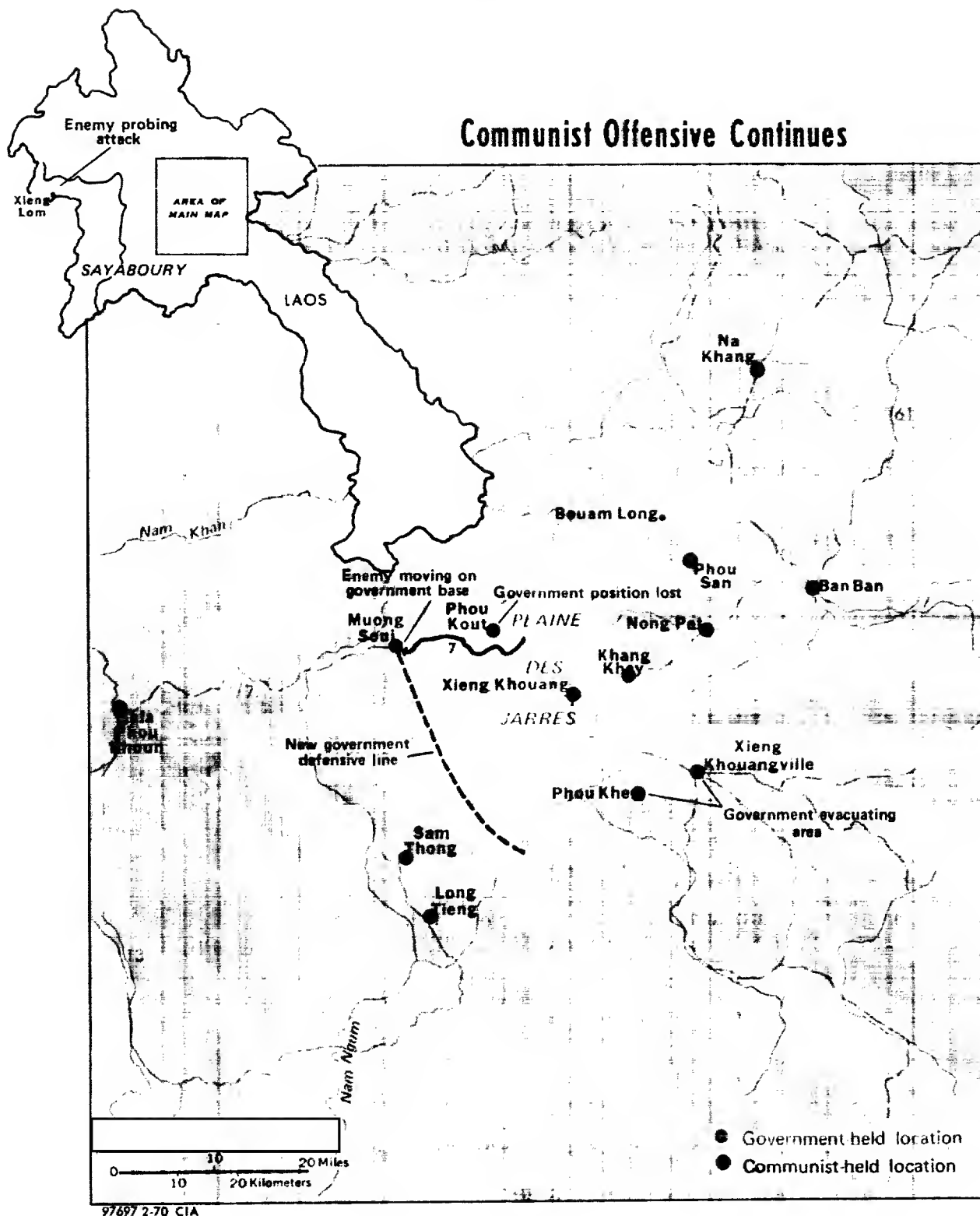
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Laos: Communist forces are pressing their advantage west of the Plaine des Jarres.

[Early on 24 February the government airstrip at Muong Soui fell to an enemy attack. The immediate obstacle to the enemy advance, the mountain outpost of Phou Kout, had fallen quickly to an enemy assault on the evening of 23 February. At last report, ammunition and POL supplies at Mounng Soui were burning and government forces were withdrawing to the west on Route 7. Mounng Soui had been an important base for Lao fighter-bombers providing close air support to government forces in the Plaine des Jarres area.]

Meanwhile, southwest of the Plaine, government forces are establishing a new crescent-shaped defensive line some ten miles off the edge of the Plaine. The new line, designed in part to check an enemy advance against the Meo community at Long Tieng, is being stiffened with several 155-mm. howitzers and most of the 1,100-man garrison that is being evacuated from the Xieng Khouangville area.

The Communist counteroffensive, which has been under way for little more than one week, has resulted in enemy reoccupation of most of the positions lost to the government rainy season offensive. The enemy's rapid advances have been in part due to General Vang Pao's efforts to keep his casualties at a minimum. At this juncture, he appears to have been successful. As of 23 February, all but 200 troops from the 1,300-man defensive force at Xieng Khouang airfield have returned to government positions.

The lack of adequate stockpiles on or near the Plaine will likely inhibit the Communists from pushing deep into government-controlled areas in the near future. Once Communist supply lines have been re-established, however, the enemy will probably turn its attention toward the newly created government defense line southwest of the Plaine.

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Meanwhile, in western Sayaboury Province, Communist forces launched their first heavy probing attack against the government base at Xieng Lom on 23 February. Xieng Lom, situated some five miles from the Thai border, is an important government staging base for guerrilla operations directed against Communist activity in the Thai-Lao border area. Greater enemy pressure against the base can be expected with an increase in both the scope and effectiveness of the government operations.

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President's Foreign Policy Message: Although there have been few comments so far from government leaders, early reactions to the message have been generally favorable, except in countries antagonistic to the US.

In Western Europe most observers assess the Presidential message as "realistic." British Defense Minister Healey publicly termed it "most impressive." A Bonn official relayed to the US Embassy his government's "great interest and admiration," and said that Chancellor Brandt would probably respond in his foreign policy address on 25 February. NATO Secretary General Brosio said the message was a signal to him and to the Europeans to start serious thinking immediately about the future of the Alliance.

There has been no official Soviet reaction to the President's message. In providing interim commentary, the press has stressed that US foreign policy goals remain unchanged. Commentators have pointed out contradictions between the goals set forth in the message and their version of US actions around the world. The "Nixon Doctrine" is said to call for using other countries to achieve US aims.

The East European regimes have also not yet reacted officially. The press, however, has commented along predictable lines, with East Germany, Bulgaria, and Albania being the most vituperative, Poland relatively objective and noncommittal, and Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia giving varying degrees of positive assessments. All, however, share the view that the message contained no new policy departures. The reaction of Romanian media stands out as the most positive and even warm, and is alone in avoiding criticism save for a mild rebuke of the "unchanged" US policy in Vietnam.

The initial Israeli response has been quite favorable. Tel Aviv's press has interpreted the report as giving a clear warning to Moscow not to

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attempt to create a sphere of influence or to intervene in the area, and as indicating that Israel will receive more US arms. The Arabs, led by Egyptian newspapers, see a reaffirmation of the complete commitment of the US to Israeli policies.

The North Vietnamese reaction to the message was predictably negative. Radio Hanoi on 20 February did note the pronouncement's "modest tone," which it said was due to the "serious setbacks" suffered by the US in recent years, particularly in Vietnam. Still, Hanoi concluded that there was no change in "the US ambition to control the world by means of US neocolonialism."

No Chinese Communist commentary on the message has been noted so far.

The President's message had a generally favorable reception in Saigon. Foreign Minister Lam, though pleased about US steadfastness, expressed concern over the phrase, "we agreed to negotiate with the National Liberation Front as one of the parties to the negotiation."

An official in Taipei felt that the President was adhering to the traditional US policy of upholding the rights of the Chinese Republic and containing the Peking regime.

The Chilean Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying that the message "shows a new and positive outlook." It especially noted the President's recognition that responsibility for the process of economic development belongs to each nation. Venezuelan President Caldera also noted favorably that "the US does not intend to impose standards, but will cooperate with our development programs." The Bolivian minister of information said the message suggested "a better understanding of Latin American reality" and a belief that American tutelage must end.

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Havana Radio claimed the speech demonstrated US determination to keep Latin America "in chains through a marked increase in private investment," and it decried the President's failure to rectify the "lopsided" trade terms between the US and Latin America.

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[Jordan: The government-fedayeen agreement on "law and order" appears less restrictive than the King's decree of 10 February and closer to the fedayeen's self-imposed curbs.

The agreement prohibits fedayeen carrying and firing of arms in the cities, prohibits fedayeen interference with civilians and security forces, puts some restrictions on fedayeen money collecting, and requires registration of fedayeen vehicles.

Fedayeen "military police," however, are permitted to carry arms, there are some exceptions on the storage of explosives and ammunition in the cities, and there are only token restrictions on public meetings and publications. Most importantly, the agreement is vague on the question of enforcement and appears to leave it at least in part to the fedayeen. The agreement states only that fedayeen violators of Jordanian law are "to be handed over" to Jordanian authorities.

The agreement is signed by Yasir Arafat, of Fatah, and by the leader of the Syrian-supported Saiqa organization. Presumably they were signing for all ten fedayeen organizations in the unified fedayeen command.



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Brazil: Efforts to acquire modern supersonic fighters continue to be frustrated by the lack of acceptable financing and the inability to buy suitable equipment.

The air force has just backed off from a preliminary agreement made with the British last year for 16 Lightnings, and is now trying to reactivate a deal with the French for Mirages. Brazil came close to accepting Mirages once before, but then turned it down.

Air force leaders probably have used negotiations with third countries in part as a tactic to try to change US military sales policies. They now appear, however, to believe that they will only be able to obtain the desired aircraft from European suppliers, although some officers still hope that the US will make modern aircraft, such as the F-4, available.

The situation may have been further confused by private US sales representatives, who have obviously whetted the appetite of the air force purchasing officers for the most sophisticated and expensive new planes.

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Guyana-Venezuela: Expiration of the Mixed Border Commission, coupled with sporadic border incidents, clouds prospects for settlement of the territorial dispute.

After four years of fruitless negotiations, the commission officially expired last week without reaching any agreement. The commission now has 90 days in which to submit its findings and another three months in which to find a solution by other means acceptable to both governments. Failing that, the case is referred by prior agreement to the UN secretary general for settlement. Discussions on a government-to-government level will probably continue during the interim period.

Meanwhile, small-scale border incidents involving machine guns and mortar fire have been occurring intermittently since last Tuesday.

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Neither side seems to have incurred any casualties, and both governments appear to be playing down the incidents. Continued clashes could jeopardize future negotiations and could cause further deterioration in relations between the two countries.

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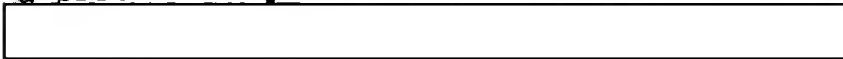
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UN: The focus will be on the Middle East at today's opening session of the 26th meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission.

The most controversial agenda item will be the report of the ad hoc committee on human rights on its investigation of alleged Israeli violations of the human rights of Arabs in the territories occupied since the 1967 war. Israel has charged the nations serving on the committee--Somalia, Ceylon, and Yugoslavia--with political bias and has refused to cooperate in the investigation, which did not consider the human rights of Jews and other minority groups in Arab countries. The Israelis have indicated that they would prefer that the US not participate in the review of the committee's report.

Israel has denied that the 1949 Geneva Convention on protection of civilians in time of war applies to the occupied territories, and may charge the Arabs with atrocities, citing the recent Swissair crash and other incidents.

Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Israel are among the parties to the convention. Attention is expected to center on charges that Israel inflicted collective punishment on Arabs in the Gaza Strip in 1969 following incidents of sabotage. Collective punishment is specifically prohibited by the convention, which also provides for full recognition of the procedural rights of accused persons. The US last fall urged the Arab governments to request the appointment of a protective power in the occupied territories.



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Cambodia: Prince Sihanouk reportedly plans to balance his private visits to Prague and Moscow with a final stop in China before returning home, probably in mid-April. Sihanouk was last in Peking in 1966, and he no doubt wants to get a look at China in the post - Cultural Revolution era, as well as to renew his acquaintance with its leaders. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Lon Nol returned to Phnom Penh on 18 February from his extended medical leave in Paris.

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Morocco: King Hassan apparently has decided to take a harsher line toward student dissenters. The King has removed Ahmed Reda Guedira as minister of state in charge of secondary and higher education and has placed the ministry under the control of Prime Minister Laraki. Guedira had attempted to enter into a dialogue with student dissenters. Nevertheless, dissident students from two schools in the university decided on Friday to continue their strike indefinitely. This decision together with the occupation of the Moroccan Embassy in Paris by students may have convinced the King that a firmer policy was needed. Laraki, who is not noted for his warmth, may prove less sympathetic toward the students than Guedira.

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